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ABSTRACT

There are three crucial communication links required for the successful transfer of technology in rubber smallholder programs: (1) from smallholder to program planners and managers, (2) within the administrative organization, and (3) from the planners and managers to the smallholders. All three links must be functioning adequately in order to achieve the basic objectives of rubber development programs which are (1) transfer of technical knowledge and (2) motivation of smallholders to adopt innovations in rubber technology. Based on experiences in Thailand, enhancing smallholder participation from the beginnings of program formulation should be given a high priority. (Author/STS)

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USING MODERN COMMUNICATION METHODS TO ENHANCE SMALLHOLDER TRAINING AND EXTENSION PROGRAMMES

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USING MODERN COMMUNICATION METHODS TO ENHANCE SMALLHOLDER TRAINING AND EXTENSION PROGRAMMES

Smallholder Development and the Transfer of Technology

The basic objectives of development programmes for rubber smallholders are to (1) transfer technical knowledge from people who have it to people who need it and (2) motivate smallholders to put into practice new skills and practices. There is a growing realization among leaders in the development field that the creation of new technology does not guarantee it will be accepted by the intended beneficiaries. Innovations in rubber technology -- high-yielding varieties, improved tapping patterns, use of chemical stimulants, replanting itself -- are merely academic research propositions until they are understood and adopted by smallholders. In order to successfully transfer rubber technology we must consider, of equal importance, (1) knowledge of the technology and (2) knowledge of the people who will implement the programmes and the smallholders who will be the recipients of the programmes.

Basic Communication Links for Smallholder Programmes

There are three crucial communication links required for the successful transfer of technology in smallholder programmes:

1. From smallholder to programme planners and managers (See TABLE 1): Information must be gathered from and about smallholders regarding their current rubber practices, perceived needs, cultural beliefs and practices, socio-economic backgrounds, educational levels, etc. Such information must be analyzed as part of the programme planning process. Selected bits of information must be gathered regularly in order to monitor change in smallholders' knowledge, attitudes and practices. This information provides feedback to planners and managers. Some of the methods of communication used to form this linkage (See TABLE 2) are social survey baseline research, needs appraisal studies; field worker reports, formative evaluation, training needs assessments, meetings with groups of

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smallholders, letters to radio stations and extension offices from smallholders, etc.

2. Within the administrative organization of the programme (See TABLE 3): For sound decision-making and timely implementation of the programme, there must be good communication and coordination within and between the units that have responsibility for the support of a programme. These units include the subject matter research units, administrative support departments like personnel and finance, field units at province or district levels, non-governmental cooperating agencies, training institutions, political bodies, etc. There is constant need for open communication and discussion within and among these units regarding programme policies, new technology, field conditions and so on. Methods of communication and coordination used here (See TABLE 4) might include management information systems, news-letters, co-ordinating committees, specialized training programmes, problem-solving seminars, meetings/conferences, information clearing-houses and direct interpersonal contact.

3. From the planners and managers to the smallholders (See TABLE 5): There must be systematic delivery of appropriate technical and motivational information to the smallholders. For a programme to be successful, the smallholders must understand, accept, and be able to put recommended innovations into practice. Thus, an important communication management task is the coordination of information flows regarding the technology, availability of physical inputs and acquisition of skills. Communication methods commonly used for this information flow (See TABLE 6) include interpersonal contacts, such as field workers, local leaders, and teachers; traditional media such as folk plays, puppet shows, folk music; mass media including radio, printed matter, mobile units, posters, etc., and many forms of adult education and training activities.

Examples of Basic Communication Linkages

Obviously, the three basic communication linkages outlined above are inter-related and must be analyzed as a package with the overall

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purpose being to help create more relevant projects which bring about greater change among smallholders. A few examples will illustrate this inter-relationship and the importance of taking a systematic approach to communication needs in smallholder programmes which can be drawn from our experience in Thailand. Various efforts have been sponsored and effected by the Development Support Communication Service (DSCS), the UNDP/FAO Rubber Project, and various agencies of the Royal Thai Government. Sample activities are listed below.

a) Communication from Smallholders

1. In anticipation of the large rubber replanting project for Thailand, DSCS supported preliminary research carried out by the Rubber Research Centre and by the Department of Agricultural Extension that contributed to a larger study of smallholder attitudes towards replanting.

2. As an aspect of the expanded replanting programme, the Rubber Replanting Aid Fund will establish a monitoring unit which will concentrate on the social acceptability of the replanting programme to smallholders.

3. DSCS has provided specialized training to training staff of the Rubber Research Centre in assessment of training needs, evaluation of training programmes, and pre-testing of materials for training smallholders.

b) Communication within and among agencies

1. Discovering a consensus among field level workers of the principle government agencies working in rubber in Thailand on the need for closer coordination of their communication activities, DSCS assisted in the establishment of an informal communications coordinating committee. Members of the committee came from the Rubber Research Centre (RRC), the Rubber Replanting Aid Fund (RRAF), and the Department of Agricultural Extension (DOAE). The committee has been working to standardize messages on technical subjects that are presented in training and

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extension programmes. The major focus of the committee has been on mass media type materials, e.g., slide presentations, printed matter, and other training materials.

2. A similar effort is underway in the general area of training. Representatives of the training divisions of the RRC, RRAF, and DOAE will participate in a training for trainers course especially prepared and offered by the National Institute of Development Administration (NIDA) for trainers working in rubber. The course will be given on two levels -- one for training managers and one for the trainers themselves. The curriculum will emphasize sharing of experience and relevant practical exercises.

c) Communication to smallholders

1. Much of the assistance by DSCS has focused on revising training activities for smallholders sponsored by RRC and RRAF. Advice has been given in revision of curricula and training staff in the preparation and utilization of training materials, testing of training materials, and evaluation of courses. Much of the output of the communications coordinating committee has been integrated into these courses.

2. A training room has been designed and equipped for various types of audio-visual presentations at the RRC school. Two other rubber training schools have been provided with necessary A-V materials and equipment.

3. A mobile unit, to be used as a mobile training centre has been procured for the RRC and staff have been trained in operation and maintenance of equipment. The unit has already been used for some training and extension activities.

Comment and Conclusion

The communication gaps between physical scientists and social scientists, between civil servants and smallholders remain wide. In rubber development programmes in Thailand, much of planning and

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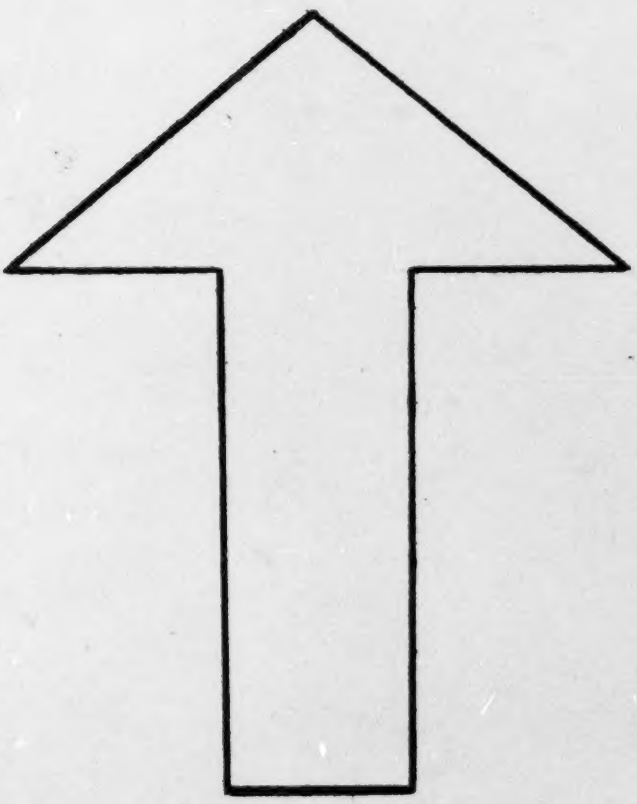
decision-making is top down and emphasizes the technical aspects of rubber technology rather than social change needs. By opening communication channels from the smallholders and by increasing the efficiency of communications within government agencies, perhaps the smallholders views can be given more prominence in development planning and their participation in the programme increased.

Similarly, more work is needed in coordination of various channels of communication to smallholders through the various agencies. For example, no serious study has yet been done of the roles of various secondary agencies that do some work in rubber, namely, the vocational colleges, the Department of Public Welfare's Land Settlements Division, the Border Patrol Police, the Department of Community Development.

Communication research has shown that the most effective development strategies are those that allow for maximum de-centralization of programme planning and implementation in order to deal most effectively with the various ethnic, cultural and developmental differences of smallholders. It must be stressed that smallholders cannot be treated as being a homogenious group. Communication research also supports the hypothesis that the most successful programmes are those in which the smallholders themselves have participated in programme conception and planning. Thus, organizational development of the bureaucracy that enhances smallholder participation from the beginnings of programme formulation should be given high priority in the future.

TABLE 1.

FROM SMALL-HOLDERS TO PLANNERS AND MANAGERS



FROM THE BOTTOM UP

TABLE 2.

SOME TYPES OF COMMUNICATION FROM SMALL-HOLDERS TO PLANNERS AND MANAGERS

- BASELINE RESEARCH
- NEEDS APPRAISAL STUDIES
- FIELD WORKER REPORTS
- FORMATIVE EVALUATIONS
- TRAINING NEEDS ASSESSMENTS
- MEETINGS WITH GROUPS OF SMALL-HOLDERS
- LETTERS TO RADIO STATIONS AND EXTENSION OFFICES FROM SMALL-HOLDERS

TABLE 3.

WITHIN AND AMONG ORGANIZATIONAL UNITS

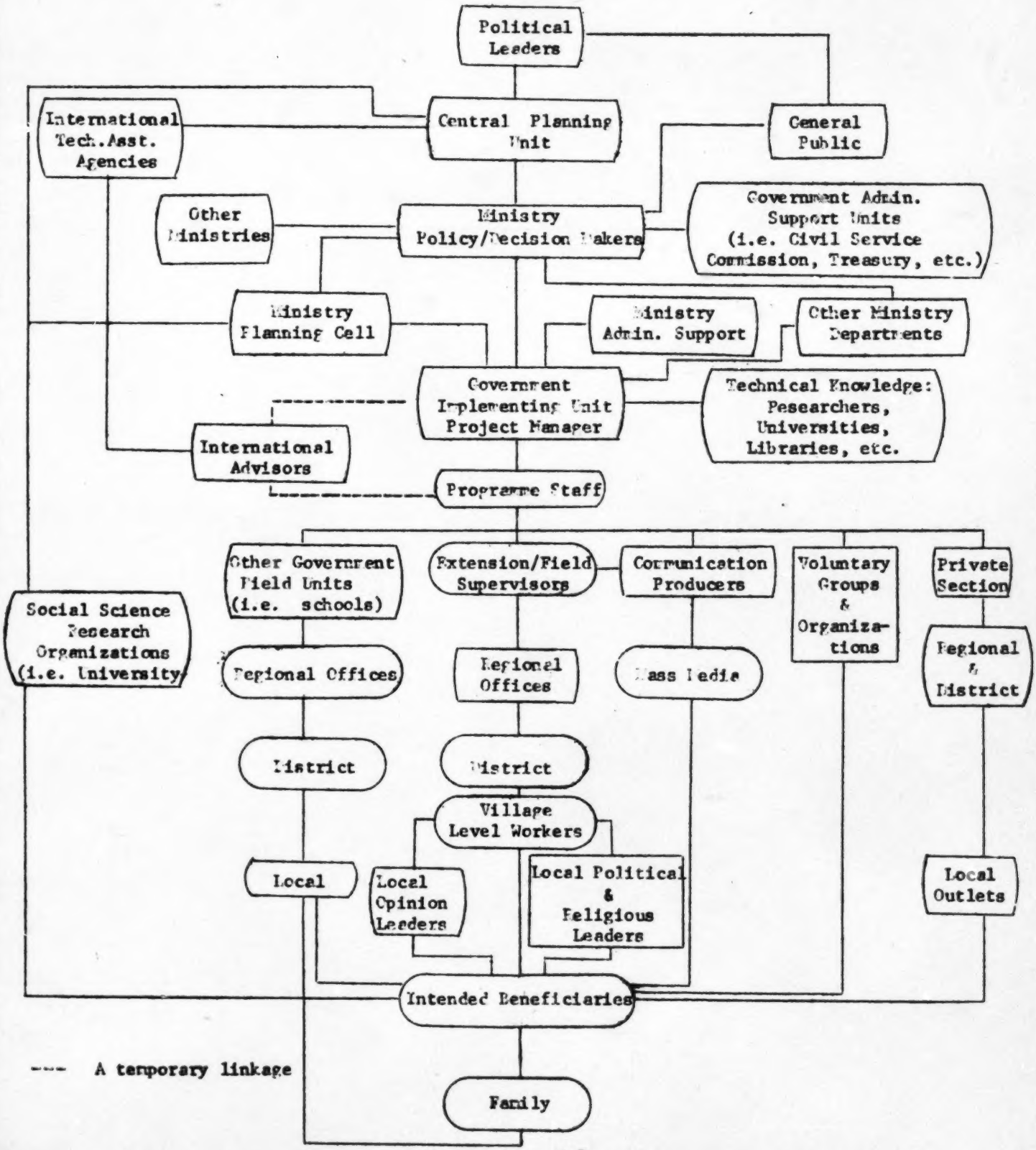


TABLE 4.

SOME TYPES OF COMMUNICATION

WITHIN AND AMONG ORGANIZATIONAL UNITS

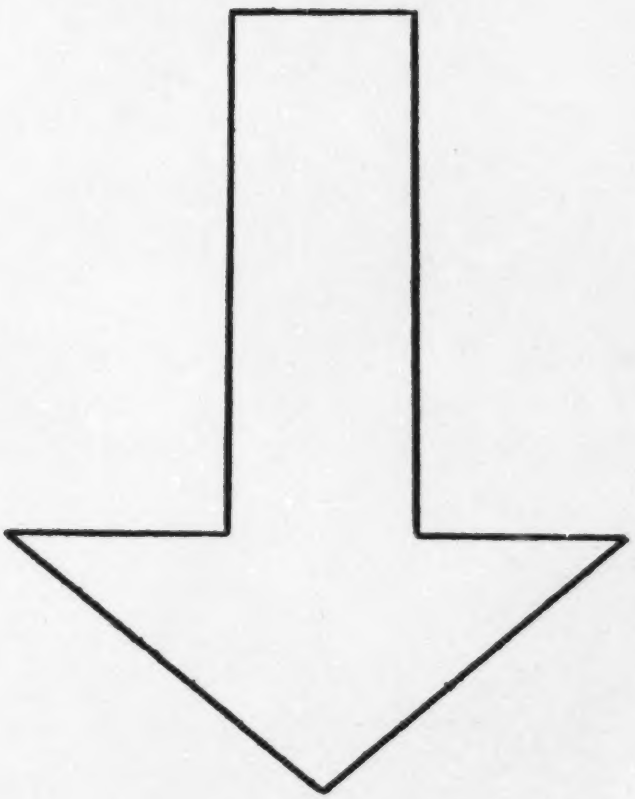
- MANAGEMENT INFORMATION SYSTEMS
- NEWSLETTERS
- CO-ORDINATING COMMITTEES
- SPECIALIZED TRAINING PROGRAMMES
- PROBLEM-SOLVING SEMINARS
- MEETINGS/CONFERENCES
- INFORMATION CLEARING-HOUSES
- INTERPERSONAL CONTACT

TABLE 5.

FROM THE PLANNERS

AND MANAGERS

TO THE SMALL-HOLDERS



FROM THE TOP DOWN

TABLE 6.

SOME TYPES OF COMMUNICATION FROM THE PLANNERS AND MANAGERS TO THE SMALL-HOLDERS

- INTERPERSONAL CONTACTS: FIELD WORKERS, LOCAL LEADERS, TEACHERS
- TRADITIONAL MEDIA: FOLK PLAYS, PUPPET SHOWS, FOLK MUSIC
- MASS MEDIA: PRINTED MATTER, RADIO-T.V., FILM, MOBILE UNITS
- TRAINING AND ADULT EDUCATION PROGRAMMES